

SPECIAL REPORT



DEMOCRATIC
POLICY
COMMITTEE

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APRIL 4, 2001

THE BUSH BUDGET FAILS TO MAKE
EDUCATION A TOP PRIORITY

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Huge Tax Cut Is Crowding Out Investment in Our Schools

The Bush Budget Puts Taxes Before Education

President Bush's budget fails to make education a top priority. The President's budget provides a \$555 billion tax cut for the top 1% of taxpayers. In contrast, it increases education spending by a mere \$41 billion over 10 years. (Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; Office of Management and Budget, A Blueprint for New Beginnings)

There are Huge Unmet Needs in Education

Without the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, we could make real progress on President Bush's avowed promise to leave no child behind. All Americans support that goal. The public knows full well that educating all our children is the nation's number-one challenge. Right now, we face huge unmet needs.

- **Teaching a Record Number of School-Age Children** – This year, schools confront record enrollments of 53 million elementary and secondary school-age students, and that number will continue to rise. Even beyond the next 10 years, the number of school-age children will continue to increase steadily. The total will rise by 6% between 2010 and 2020.
- **Preventing a Teaching Shortage** -- We have to hire more than 2 million teachers, as a result of increasing enrollments, teacher turnover, and the retirement of many veteran teachers. This amounts to replacing over half of the entire teaching force over the next decade.
- **Improving Teacher Quality** – We must seize the moment to make sure the next generation of teachers is highly qualified. Currently, too many of our nation's teachers are not properly trained to do an effective job in the classroom – 7% of all teachers are not fully certified, and 24% of middle and high school teachers do not have a college major or minor in their main teaching subject.
- **Attracting the Best and Brightest to Teaching** – We are not attracting a fair share of the best college graduate into teaching, and we are not holding on to many of the most qualified teachers. There is little mystery as to why. Teachers are significantly underpaid. According to one analysis, teachers with bachelor's degrees are paid at a level 38% below others in the workforce with the same education. Whether teachers will be from the top or bottom half of new graduates will largely be determined by whether we provide a greater financial incentive to enter teaching.

- **Cutting the Size of Classes** – More teachers and smaller classes are important to help all students, and they have a dramatic impact on those from low-income families. In fact, smaller class sizes are key to substantially closing the achievement gap between high-performing and low-performing children. But today, nearly 80% of our classes have more than 18 students. To leave no child behind, we must reduce the size of all core classes by helping schools recruit and hire more teachers. To cut the size of every American classroom for core, academic subject to 18 students would require adding more than 500,000 teachers.
- **Making our Schools Modern and Safe** – We have not properly maintained our schools so they can offer quality education. Too many children are sitting in classrooms that do not meet minimal health or safety standards and many others are attending classes in trailers. There is an estimated backlog of \$127 billion in repair and renovation needs for existing school buildings, and that does not include money for new schools that are needed to get kids out of trailers.

In addition to these unmet needs, it is clear that we must do more to improve school safety -- hiring more school counselors and expanding after-school programs.

Bush Budget Falls Short on Education Challenges

In the face of these huge unmet needs, the Bush budget fails to make education the top priority.

President Bush Proposes the Smallest Increase for Education in Five Years. To make room for his huge tax cuts, President Bush's budget would provide only \$44.5 billion for the U.S. Department of Education, a \$2.4 billion (or 6%) increase and the smallest in six years (in percentage terms). Last year, the Education Department received a \$6.5 billion (or 18%) increase. Over the last five years, education increases have averaged 13%.

The Bush Budget Starves Key Education Initiatives. President Bush provides only a \$2.4 billion increase for education. This includes only \$400 million for all other education programs – aside from reading and Pell Grants). This means that all other elementary, secondary, and higher education programs, special education, and vocational education will be left with less than enough just to keep up with inflation. His budget:

- **Eliminates the Class-Size Reduction Initiative/Underfunds the Commitment to More & Better Teachers.** The Bush budget consolidates class-size and Eisenhower professional development, failing to provide enough funding to continue reducing class size or expand professional development and training for teachers. The Bush budget provides far less than Democrats have proposed to improve teacher training and continue on the path to put 100,000 quality teachers in the classroom. This year, there are 37,000 teachers funded through the class size

reduction program providing smaller classes to 2 million children. Many of these teachers could be let go, due to insufficient education increases in the Bush budget.

- **Zeros Out School Modernization.** Instead of moving forward toward modern and safe schools, the Bush budget eliminates the School Renovation Program next year, and retroactively redirects the \$1.2 billion already appropriated for this year to technology and special education. As many as 1,000 schools will not be renovated.
- **Breaks Promise on Increase in Pell Grants.** The budget request is \$1.5 billion short of President Bush's campaign proposal to provide \$5,100 Pell grants to low-income freshman. President Bush proposed a \$1 billion increase for the Pell program—but over \$540 million is needed just to maintain the maximum Pell grant at \$3,750. As a result, the maximum Pell grant would increase by no more than \$150 (or 4%) under the Bush budget.
- **Makes No Progress on Special Education Funding.** In his campaign, President Bush promised to increase resources for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), moving toward meeting the full federal commitment of 40% of the average per pupil expenditures. However, the limited education resources in his budget make it unlikely that he will increase the current level of 15% of special education costs.
- **Continues GOP Proposals That Divert Funds Away from Public Schools.** Not only does the Bush budget provide insufficient resources to meet our growing education needs, it would actually divert funds away from public schools by calling for private school vouchers and education savings accounts. The budget reiterates the Administration's proposal to allow Title I money to be used to pay for private school vouchers. Further, the Bush budget diverts over \$5.6 billion for tax-preferred Education Savings Accounts to pay for tuition at private and religious schools.

The public strongly supports a national investment in improving the nation's public schools. President Bush should scale back his tax cuts for the wealthy in order to make education the top priority.